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AUTHOR Napoli, Mary
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ABSTRACT

A substantial body of research elaborates and documents how practicing teachers support the writing development of young children (Atwell, 1987; Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1986, 1994; Graves, 1981; Lensmire, 1994; Routman, 2000). Yet, there is limited research about how preservice teachers learn about children's writing (Dahl and Farnan, 1998) or about how opportunities to work in a classroom setting affect their prior beliefs about the teaching of writing (Newkirk, 1995). This study explores preservice teachers' reflections about invitations on their learning to teach writing during a nine-credit block of language and literacy courses. Using a teacher research lens, the study takes a second look at their reflections and suggests that the course invitations offer distinct opportunities for their learning about the teaching of writing. From the course invitations, preservice teachers reported they acquired new understandings about writing instruction as a result of participating in socially shared systems of learning. Implications for teacher research are outlined in clarifying a vision of studying the researcher's own teaching context as a form of knowledge production. (Contains 39 references and 6 notes. An appendix contains a list of interview questions.) (Author/RS)

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Running Head: Preservice Teachers' Reflections about Learning to Teach Writing

Submitted by:
Mary Napoli
Assistant Professor
Education Department
Elizabethtown College

Doctoral Student
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park , PA 16802

Address:
Mary Napoli
859 Innsbruck Drive
Hummelstown, PA 17036
Marynapoli@hotmail.com
717-361-1572 (office)
717-520-1467 (home)

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Abstract

A substantial body of research elaborates and documents how practicing teachers support the writing development of young children (Atwell, 1987; Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1986, 1994; Graves, 1981; Lensmire, 1994; Routman, 2000). Yet, there is limited research about how preservice teachers' learn about children's writing (Dahl and Farnan, 1998) or about how opportunities to work in a classroom setting effect their prior beliefs about the teaching of writing (Newkirk, 1995). This study explores preservice teachers' reflections about invitations on their learning to teach writing during a language and literacy course. Using a teacher research lens, I take a second look at their reflections and suggest that the course invitations offer distinct opportunities for their learning about the teaching of writing. From the course invitations,[1] preservice teachers' reported they acquired new understandings about writing instruction as a result of participating in socially shared systems of learning. Implications for teacher research are outlined in clarifying a vision of studying my own teaching context as a form of knowledge production.

## Introduction

The teaching of writing in both elementary and secondary schools has been widely documented (Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1994; Dyson, 1995; Graves, 1981, 1983; Lensmire, 1994; Newkirk, 1995; Routman, 2000). University researchers as well as classroom teachers have commented on effective teaching and student writing development. Yet, few studies explore how beginning teachers come to understand writing and teaching (Dahl and Farnan, 1998). In this study, I look closely at three preservice teachers' changing understandings of writing and teaching, as they navigated their way through a nine-credit literacy education course (referred to as the Block). Using their words, I examine the effectiveness of five course invitations pertaining to writing instruction in the elementary classroom.

My interest in this study is personal as well as pedagogical. In the early 1990s, I was studying to become an elementary teacher. At that time, a full ten years after the debut of the writing process movement, my language arts textbook offered only eight pages addressing composing text in the classroom. As a result, I started teaching first grade with an insufficient view of teaching writing . Feeling inadequate about my instruction, I enrolled in the National Writing Project (NWP) in 1994 to learn more about the writing process. One of the key principles of the NWP is to invite teachers to learn about the recursive, idiosyncratic nature of writing by engaging in their own writing. During this time, I read professional books, dialogued with other teachers, and engaged in several writing simulations. As a consequence of this five week institute, where I witnessed and participated in other's trial run workshops, and immersed myself in one-on-one coaching sessions with other teachers and directors, I developed a good sense of what it takes to become successful as a teacher of writing within the context of my own classroom.

Four years later, I enrolled in a graduate program to study literacy and to teach preservice teachers about reading, writing, literature and teaching. In this paper, I take Ann Berthoff's (1987) advice that "teachers need time to think about the information that they already have," in order to rethink my teaching and preservice teachers' developing understanding of the teaching of writing.

By REsearching (Berthoff, 1987) my work with undergraduate students, I evaluate the pedagogical invitations offered preservice teachers my course and highlight their thoughts about the invitations while capturing their discussion of writing and teaching.

To further support preservice teachers' learning about the teaching of writing, I revisit their responses to the course invitations and reread transcripts of interviews conducted during the semester. The following sections of the paper focus on (1) the intentions of the course components and an introduction to the participants, (2) preservice teachers' understanding of these opportunities, and (3) the results of preservice teachers' learning and knowledge. After these discussions , I offer a description of what I learned as a result of this study.

The Block: Theoretical underpinnings

Teacher education courses can help preservice teachers articulate and support their developing beliefs about writing instruction by encouraging them to integrate their own literacy experiences, theory gained through course work and practice observed in schools (Zeek and Wickstrom, 1999). In much the same way as people learn in natural settings-- communities, families and the workplace (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), the premise of the Language and Literacy Block is that learning takes place through joint productive activities. The course is based on Vygotsky's notion that cognition is socially mediated or influenced by others through social interaction. Higher mental functions, such as self-regulation and reflection, occur in the context of a shared task definition between individuals and arise through collaboration. (Vygotsky, 1978). The development of this higher mental process is directly shaped both by the knowledge systems, tools, structures, and practices of the sociocultural milieu in which they are learning and growing and by the immediate interactions occurring in their zone of proximal development (ZPD)[2] , the interpersonal space where learning and development take place.

Moreover, students' social experiences with a more knowledgeable practioner will be internalized (what Gee labels acquisition [3]) and with more direct scaffolding, students learn to talk more knowledgeably about their new knowledge (Gee's notion of learning [4]). Thus, socially shared cognitive formats and various forms of interaction with their peers (i.e., dyads, small groups,

cohorts, etc.) help promote preservice teachers' learning (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998).

Block Format

During the block, preservice teachers attend both large and small group sessions in a university setting where department faculty and graduate student instructors offer them opportunities to review, discuss and question their developing understanding of literacy education. Within the nature of the block, preservice teachers are encouraged to rethink traditional ways of teaching and learning about writing as they engage in the following five course invitations.

1. Autobiography. In order to assist preservice teachers to engage in a reflective examination of their own literacy development as readers and writers, they are asked to compose a narrative essay about their earliest memories about literacy learning. By purposefully and thoughtfully examining their literacy backgrounds, they experience the role of writing in shaping their thinking (Applebee, 1984). Not only do faculty members want preservice teachers to be "inside the writing...to experience it as authors of their own stories, and as writers for real reasons," but also to identify, analyze, and evaluate the formative literacy events, people, artifacts in their histories in order to begin to imagine how writing could be better for themselves and for their future students. [5]

2. Double entry journal. Preservice teachers are encouraged to explore their growth and understanding of the course readings and lectures by maintaining a journal in which to record their thoughts and reflections. One of the intentions behind the journal is for preservice teachers to practice the language and ideas of this new discourse in a manner that facilitates eventual understanding of their form and relationship. Intimately tied to this activity is Vygotsky's notion of inner speech (1978). Vygotsky saw internalization as the internal reconstruction of an external operation (Wertsch, 1990). In this case, inner speech comes between the preservice teacher and the course readings which influence their perception of literacy education. Their reflections may enable their engagement into ways of seeing, restructuring, and intervening in which they may wish to make their own (Schon, 1983).

3. Analysis of Student Writing. Working with a partner, preservice teachers are asked to connect their growing understanding of writing development by analyzing several unedited pieces of student

writing across time. Vygotsky (in Wertsch, 1985) believed that in order for learning to become internalized, mediation must occur during the actual problem-solving and joint activity or shared task definition with others. By creating this shared space for collaborative interaction and analysis, new ways of knowing could be constructed. According to faculty who teach this course,, the design of this assignment, if understood by preservice teachers, could support their future curriculum. It requires preservice teachers to look at student work in various ways. Not only must they describe the elementary student writers' development, but they need to figure out what the child could do next with the help of a "more knowledgeable adult or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

4. Composing a Parent Letter. Based on course readings, lecture discussions, and their experiences in a classroom, preservice teachers are invited to develop a hypothetical letter explaining the purpose of their classroom writing program in theoretically sound, understandable meta-language. The rationale behind this experience is to encourage preservice teachers to envision themselves as teachers, not students, in order to describe the potential writing engagements of their literacy classroom. This invitation embraces Vygotsky's (1978) notion of socially shared cognition that is based on the principle that effective instruction includes a concern for the learner's potential development. In this case, preservice teachers collaborate and unpack the discourse that they learned about pedagogy, such as mediated notions of planning and organizing a writing classroom.

5. Field experience component. As part of the block, preservice teachers are required to make six, two-hour visits to an area elementary school to assist the classroom teacher with class activities; to gather data for later analysis; to study the classroom literacy environment and to assess one child's literacy learning process. The intent of the classroom visits is to situate learning with contextual and interactional activities. During each visit to a classroom, preservice teachers become "College Writing Buddies," who work with third grade partners to develop and write ideas for a student's original story. As the workshop leader, I adapted this opportunity, enabling all thirty members of my class cohort to visit one third grade class. Preservice teachers work in pairs to observe the literacy components in the classroom and to talk with the classroom teacher and students. Within

this context, College Writing Buddies also engage in the process of "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1985) and observe the student writers' strengths. This supported experience helps preservice teachers come to define for themselves what it means to be a writing teacher and attempt to learn what Lave & Wenger (1991) call the newcomer's tasks in "legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 35).

Data Sources, Collection, and Analysis

The participants in this study were volunteer undergraduate preservice teachers enrolled in the nine credit course during the Spring 1999 semester. Steve, Clare, and Julie[6] were second semester juniors who volunteered during the second week of the semester to engage in an in-depth analysis of their understandings of the course invitations. The primary data sources for this research were preservice teachers' written artifacts of the course invitations (i.e., autobiography assignments, parent letters, student writing analysis, field experience assignments, and journal responses). One-on-one, audio-taped informal discussions, approximately 60 minutes in length, were conducted over a ten week period. A series of preplanned questions pertaining to the writing experiences in the context of their home and school environment and their thoughts about the readings, lectures, and field experience was developed and used as a guide to facilitate discussions (see Appendix). All conversations were transcribed by the researcher using guidelines from The Art of Classroom Inquiry (Hubbard and Power, 1993). Secondary data sources included a teacher research notebook to record my notes and observations of preservice teachers' engagement during field experience visits and course engagements.

The methods used to collect and analyze data for this study are associated with qualitative (Creswell, 1998) and teacher research studies (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1993; Hollingsworth and Sockett, 1994). In order to evaluate the pedagogical invitations and the preservice teachers' discussion of writing and teaching, I read their written responses to the invitations in order to identify and establish trends among them. Repeated statements were compared and contrasted with other statements across the data, which allowed an analysis for patterns of similarities and differences. Then, I reread the transcripts from the informal interviews

and searched for patterns in their responses pertaining to the specific course invitations. To test the reliability of these patterns, I engaged in a second reading of their double entry journals, specifically searching for statements about the pedagogical invitations and their understanding of writing and the teaching of writing. Pattern coding was used to group overarching constructs of preservice teachers' views about learning to teach about writing and to cluster views across each invitation. One year after the study, I conducted a telephone interview with each participant to determine whether the course invitations had an effect on their learning and knowledge about writing.

Results of each invitation

Invitation 1: Autobiography

The three participants became highly aware that this activity focused on the examination of their prior learning experiences in order to situate themselves as literacy teachers for the next generation of elementary students. They also indicated that they were not afforded with daily opportunities to write in elementary school. For example, Clare said that she always liked writing. "I wrote poetry during my free time, but not as much in school. I always wrote at home or during study halls, yet I was never given opportunities to write in a community atmosphere. I suppose my school programs didn't recognize daily writing as a valued component for students" (interview: February 8).

From the foundational work of teacher-researchers and writers such as Graves (1985), Atwell (1987), Calkins (1994), Harywayne (1992) and Routman (2000), being a teacher-as-writer is integral to making writing a central component of the classroom. Students and teachers are encouraged to think of themselves as writers to "live between the lines" (Calkins, 1991) and to create a celebratory community of writers by sharing and supporting the process. Yet, all three participants, Steve, Julie and Clare, indicated that their notions of writing engagements consisted of filling in story starter worksheets and completing many grammar exercises in isolation. For instance, Steve indicated, "In school, I remember writing many research reports and essays that were always assigned by the teacher. I never had opportunities to engage in free writing activities about my own interests" (interview: February 11). I asked Steve to discuss any memories about how writing was taught. He described writing in elementary school as "painful," and he attributed

his dislike of writing specifically to his fifth grade teacher who used "a lot of red pen all over his ideas and then asked him to redo the paper--I don't think that this led to any creativity on my part" (interview: February 11).

The participants' verbal and written responses also indicated that they did not view themselves as writers. In Julie's written autobiography, she stated that her primary and secondary schooling experiences focused heavily on reading and writing assessment tests.

> I don't have any memories about my writing experiences. When I think of writers, I think of those who are accomplished and have published widely. I don't consider myself a very good writer. I write reports and essays because these are the types of activities that I have been exposed to in school. During my school experiences, I was given many writing tests to assess my understanding of writing conventions, so I am really good at diagraming sentences and punctuating a series of phrases. (February 12)

In the case of Julie's experiences, composing was "taught" in isolated segments. During a separate interview, Julie mentioned that writing has always been a challenge for her. She stated, "My former teachers really focused on the perfect replication of rules, knowledge and behavior, so it really wasn't until my sophomore English class in college where I was provided with total freedom to play with language" (interview: February 18).

In addition to limited exposure to writing in school, the participants also mentioned a lack of home influence and support. For instance, Steve stated that in his earliest memories of writing, he remembers scribbling lots of pictures and symbols on paper and on his bedroom wall. He was never encouraged or asked to explain what he was trying to say, but remembered being reprimanded for scribbling 'nonsense' on a perfectly good piece of paper, not to mention the wall. In a later interview, Steve mentioned that reflecting on this home experiences has helped him to realize the importance of communicating with parents. He stated that in his future role as a teacher, he wants for parents to understand that scribbling represents students' first attempts to communicate their thoughts in writing and that these must be celebrated. In a separate interview with Julie, she

indicated:

> I didn't see my parents writing very much while growing up. If I every asked them to help me spell a word, they would simply stop what they were doing and write it for me. Therefore, I was never really given an opportunity to experiment with writing and was forced to think that perfect penmanship and spelling were the most important components to my written work. (February 18)

Like Steve, Julie also recognized the importance of reflecting on her negative experience in order to imagine how things could be better for her future students. In rereading the participants' autobiographies, I discovered similar revelations. For instance, when Steve rebelled by refusing to do homework and reports, he disappointed his parents. He felt shut out and chose to associate with friends who were highly philosophical, but institutionally unacceptable. He also commented that despite this memory being a difficult one to write about, he now recognized the powerful influence that parental and school expectations have on students' learning. Both Clare and Julie mentioned that the constant burden of trying to be "correct" and "perfect" had silenced them in some ways. Julie wrote "I had to meet such high expectations and demands that I really couldn't share my true stance about the world and my interactions within it." Similarly Clare indicated that the focus on perfection stifled her creative abilities.

It is significant to note that the participants' recognized their former experiences with writing as ones focused on perfection and product rather than on experimentation and process. Based upon the critiques of preservice teachers' own experiences, they began to imagine ways to make writing more meaningful for their own students, thus fulfilling the faculty's intentions of this invitation.

Invitation 2: Double-entry journal

As participants read course materials about writing instruction , they described shifts in interpreting theory based upon their personal school experiences. As the participants' shared new discursive positions, they continued to see themselves as learners in the discourse of teaching For

example, Clare selected to respond to Roxanne Henkin's (1995) article entitled "Insiders and Outsiders in First Grade Writing Workshops:Gender and Equity issues" which reports the author's observations of the gender indifference and inequity that occurred in a first grade classroom. Clare reported her surprise and heightened awareness that issues of gender, discrimination and injustice exist even within an elementary classroom.

> I can't believe the issues that these children were dealing with. All of this indifference because same-sexed genders sensed that they had no control of the situation. I don't remember ever feeling this way when I was in elementary school. This article really helped to broaden my perspective about issues of gender within the elementary classroom. I believe that as a future teacher, I need to be more aware of these issues. As a facilitator of tomorrow's generation of children, I need to provide the spaces for children to discuss issues pertaining to gender, class, and race. (March 1999)

By reflecting on this reading, Clare not only captured her understanding of the article, but also examined her thoughts about her future teaching. Steve and Julie also commented on their commitment to establish a learning environment where students are respectful members of the writing community. In Steve's entry, he stated that having never had opportunities to participate in a writer's workshop in elementary school has encouraged him to apply the principles in Bridges' chapter in his own classroom. He wrote:

> I really appreciate the information that Bridges'(1997) provides in this chapter. Turning children into authors and letting them choose the topics that they want to write about is very different than my own experiences. By establishing a writer's workshop, children are invited to explore their own interests. I am excited to foster this type of environment in my classroom and plan to create as Smith (1988) describes a 'community of readers and writers.' (March 1999)

Both examples embrace the "immediacy of natural perception mediated by inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 32).

The idea of establishing a writing community also emerged as a result of listening to lectures and viewing videos of writing communities such as Beth Olshansky's classroom where students engage in the image-making process (1994). In Julie's journal, she indicated that the course has helped her to understand how children move from being novice writers to skilled writers within a writing workshop and looked forward to the actual experience of working and observing a student during her field experience visits. She wrote,

> I entered the semester thinking that I was going to learn to teach children to make letters and to write simple sentences. Instead, I am being pushed to think about the process that children engage in while writing. I hope that our field experience will help me witness many of the ideas that I have been reading about. (March 1999)

Using the journal as a place for writing down instant reactions to new ideas, and then reflecting both on these reactions and the original ideas, provided preservice teachers with a tool for recognizing change over time. In the above entries, participants' revealed their need to produce and perform themselves as the professional 'teacher' imagined as necessary for implementing the writing process in tomorrow's classroom. Therefore, the journal served as a site where the preservice teachers' self can be reconstituted by 'putting on' what Gee describes as "the identity kit" of a new discourse, with its own particular "instructions on how to act and talk as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (Gee, 1991).

Invitation 3: Analysis of student writing

All of the participants valued the experience of collecting writing samples for later analysis. They felt that this hands-on experience played a significant role in understanding the development of a child's writing. Julie indicated that the opportunity to analyze the student writing sample

prompted her to reflect upon her knowledge about children, writing, and assessment.

> As I reflect upon the writing analysis completed by my third grade buddy, I am more confident to implement this process in my own classroom. By focusing on the child's strengths and by recommending appropriate interventions, I am making solid applications of theoretical knowledge to a real situation. I plan on utilizing this approach when assessing my future students' writing. (Journal entry: April 1999)

Clare and Steve were field experience partners and worked with the same third grade student. By working together, they noticed the writer's current understanding and figured out what the student was ready to learn. Steve viewed the experience as a practical form of assessment and as a tool to inform parents about their child's literacy growth. During an informal conversation with Steve, he stated, "I am convinced that I will now be able to speak confidently about my philosophical approach toward writing with school members, parents, principals and even other teachers. The opportunity to analyze a child's writing for strengths really tapped my ability to understand and interpret the theoretical information that I have been reading this semester. I feel that this assignment positioned me as one of the "experts" in connecting theory to practice."

Clare echoed Steve's positive stance toward completing this invitation, yet acknowledged the realities of a busy classroom life. She wrote:

> I think that the writing analysis really helped me to grasp the theoretical connections about a child's development. Yet, I don't know if I could actually complete this process in such detail for every single student four times a year. I think that the analysis would be useful for parent conferences and for a child's growing portfolio. I believe that it is imperative for parents to understand that children develop as writers at different levels. Therefore, now that I am aware of this new knowledge, I want to share this information with future parents as I continue to develop an understanding of how children make sense of their world through print. (Journal entry: April 1999)

The partnership appeared to afford Clare and Steve with positive experiences for cognitive support. Their combined efforts on the shared goal task of analyzing the students' writing created a common basis for socially mediated knowledge.

Preservice teachers also looked prospectively at student work in terms of what the student is likely to need to know and be able to do next. The faculty considered this course invitation as the "heart of the block" since it demands that preservice teachers assume the role of the teacher. Preservice teachers need to figure out several ways to proceed with a child by honoring where that child is likely to grow successfully with help. In response to this intention, Julie described this process as the most rewarding aspect of the assignment. She wrote:

> On our way back from school today, Steve and I talked about how different our elementary students' pieces looked both in content and in genre. After gazing at his student's writing, I realized that writing is really a complex array of processes and subprocesses. I realized that one strategy does not fit the needs of all writers. The recommendations that I had for my student certainly would not meet the needs of Steve's writer. I think that this activity helped me to understand how I want to assess the growth of my future students. (Journal entry: April 1999)

After reading Julie's journal, I asked Steve to comment about his views toward the course invitation and its implications in working with future writers. His comments follow:

> As I reflect upon this assignment, I recognize how important this experience is to understanding the role of writing and the nature of its impact in supporting children's development in literacy and learning. I now see a natural link between writing and the reading of literature. I discovered that young children can learn about language by looking at how it appears in print. My experience with the third grade student helped me to realize that using children's literature will help him learn about print conventions and language structures

> that can transfer over to his own writing. Thanks to Susan Lunsford's book (1998), I now understand how literature can serve as a model for language use and style. More importantly, I learned that I need to honor what this student already knows before making suggestions. I think that this type of analysis will become an integral component of the way that I celebrate my students' writing growth.
>
> (Interview: April 1999)

Despite the slight disagreement about the frequency of its use, the participants' acknowledge the usefulness of this invitation and mentioned its place in their future literacy classrooms. Preservice teachers' noted the experience to be of value to their understanding a child's writing development. More specifically, their comments embraced their heightened awareness about the significance of this type of assessment in their classrooms. Steve's new understandings about the reading/writing relationship is a key factor to his development as an educator. As future teachers of student writers, both Julie and Steve's reflections echoed the work of Bridges (1997) who noted that "we cannot expect the same of every student. The art of the writing teacher is to focus on the writer's strengths-celebrate all that the writer can do--and then nudge the writer forward with sensitive instruction delivered at the point of need." Moreover, preservice teachers discussed and assessed their understandings about the students' writing development with a peer. Consequently, they exchanged interpersonal knowledge about writing development and about teaching (i.e., sharing between people) which enhanced their intrapersonal knowledge (i.e., within the person; internalized) (Wertsch, 1985).

Invitation 4: Composing a Parent Letter

Preservice teachers indicated that establishing a positive line of communication with parents is a critical component to their role as teachers. For instance, Clare indicated that when she becomes a teacher, she will always inform parents about her teaching philosophy, especially about writing. In a reflective statement, she referred to the parent letter as "one of the most practical and applicable assignments that I had to complete while working on my degree (April 1999)."

Agreeing, Steve thought that it was important for teachers "to inform parents about the classroom context and to invite them to become members of their child's learning community. This assignment has proven to be one of the most useful projects; it was challenging because I had to really think about what I believed about children, writing, and assessment" (April 1999).

Both Clare and Steve's statements are promising in their future work in creating a positive relationship with parents about their writing program. In a separate conversation, Clare stated,

> It is important for teachers to be knowledgeable about the latest in literacy learning, yet it is even more critical for us to share this information with parents and their children. I know that my parents never received comments about my progress except for my report card. I really think that the parent letter could help teachers, students and parents become partners in the process. (April 1999)

Again, preservice teachers worked together to discuss and translate their knowledge about writing in understandable terms. Although the joint activity provided a collectivist perspective, individual ownership also occurred leading to personal understanding. For instance, Julie commented about her heightened awareness of communicating with the parents of her future students as a result of this experience. In her journal entry, she wrote:

> Before this class, I never really thought about how important it is to invite parents to help with activities such as the writing workshop. I suppose much of this prior belief was grounded in my own schooling experiences. My parents were not invited to participate in any of my classroom projects except for field trips or school plays. I really cannot express how much the parent letter assignment has helped me to position myself as a literacy educator. I really had to think about what I believed about children as learners. All of the lectures and course readings provided the framework that I needed to create an understandable letter about my future literacy classroom. (April 1999)

This invitation enabled students to co-create and co-design a hypothetical letter describing their literacy environment. In my own teacher research journal, I share my observations of preservice teachers as they brainstormed and collaborated in the process. I wrote:

> As I listen to and observe these beginning teachers refer to theorists in their conversations and question their developing understandings, I am encouraged by their enthusiasm and excitement about teaching. The assignment positions them as the "expert." Consequently, as they craft ideas to share with their audience, they select words and phrases that are invitational and understandable. (April 1999)

The opportunity to develop a parent letter was an essential component of their future role as educators. Through the constant support from peers, they came to their own understanding about teaching (i.e., intrapersonal knowledge). Thus, the invitation served as a powerful vehicle for preservice teachers to collaborate, dialogue, and embrace theories in ways that uniquely celebrated their learning.

Invitation 5: Field experience component

The field experience arrangement embraced situated learning that occurs during situated activity or in authentic settings, i.e., in classroom settings with contextual and interactional episodes and cues. Within the context of a third grade classroom, preservice teachers were able to use and position their learning about writing from course readings and lectures to acquire a better understanding of teaching. For example, Julie reported that her original notions about the teaching of writing were challenged. She wrote:

> This experience has changed my perception about teaching writing in the sense that I now understand that writing is a developmental process. Even though I read about writing and listened to lectures, seeing writing in action has helped me to see the possibilities. (April 1999)

Similarly, Steve indicated that being immersed in the classroom environment enabled him to reflect

upon his growing understanding on how to teach writing. He wrote:

> By working as a College Writing Buddy, I was the 'expert' or as Vygotsky would say, the more knowledgeable peer. I really valued the experience to work with an individual student despite the fact that I don't agree with everything that I observe in the classroom. Yet, I am able to learn about the child's strengths and ability to brainstorm ideas in order to develop a story. Based on my field experience and knowledge about writing, I have a better grasp on how to incorporate a writing workshop in my classroom.
>
> (March 1999)

Preservice teachers collaboratively worked with a child on a piece of writing over a six week period. In a Vygotskian sense, this authentic setting provided them with the space to experience, see and manipulate the concepts and theories which they had only read and heard about in other course invitations. For instance, in a conversation with Julie, she commented on her new understandings.

> This experience has drastically changed my perspective on teaching writing in a positive way. Although I was a bit skeptical when reading some of the articles, I didn't feel that it was possible for young children to create their own story and to not let their frustrations get the best of them. I envisioned many complaining students who didn't want to write their own ideas. I was pleasantly surprised to observe all of the children trying to compose their story to the best of their ability. It was helpful that they were encouraged to write about a topic of their choice and to celebrate their writing with an author's tea. I feel that I am now ready to try this approach in my own classroom. (April 1999)

Analysis of these statements echoed the value of providing preservice teachers with opportunities to

look through the lens of a future teacher as they became insiders in the process. In my teacher research journal, I wrote the following observation: "In my opinion, the discovery of multiple perspectives highlights the importance of preservice teachers' examining themselves as teachers of future writers, reflecting on their own stance during writing conferences, and exploring ways to talk about writing with students to foster understandings." (March 11, 1999)

The following data supports that the time spent observing and interacting with elementary students while working on the writing of a fictional story developed new understandings for preservice teachers. For example, as Clare and Steve worked with the same third grade student, they both mentioned individual experiences and understandings about how a story developed from their students' imagination. She stated,

> Even though I have been reading about and watching videos about the writing workshop, it was beneficial for me to be immersed in the process. I liked having the chance to be a second teacher and believed that I helped my third grade buddy with many aspects of his writing. For instance, I listened to his draft many times and each time, I noticed that he was able to add, revise, and edit his work. I now realize the importance of the teacher-student writing conference. (April 1999)

Similarly, Steve indicated that he learned the value of student ownership while working with this student. He wrote:

> During our second meeting with our third grade buddy, Clare and I noticed that he took control of his story and made it his own. He still asked for our advice from time to time, but he no longer depended upon us to craft his initial ideas. I can remember how many times that I changed my ideas because they didn't appeal to my teachers' interests. Our student was writing about a topic that I didn't find particularly interesting, yet, by respecting his thoughts and by sharing children's

> books that pertained to his interests, I became fascinated by my partner's ability to compose his own story. (March 1999)

In these statements, preservice teacher partners served as "sounding boards" to hear student ideas and to sort out their observations as they questioned and reflected on teaching. Moreover, these exchanges served as valuable scaffolding experiences. As one of the faculty members stated, "Preservice teachers need to be in the classroom to feel the atmosphere, to smell the smells, touch the room artifacts, hear the talk, take in the swirling activity and to begin to make sense of it." (9/2000)

Conclusions: What I learned: Implications for Teacher Educators

My encounters with the three participants provided me with an opportunity to reflect upon the effectiveness of the invitations required by the Language and Literacy block and my role as a workshop leader. Because I continue to analyze and rethink my own teaching and learning, I wanted to determine how the various invitations mediated the students' learning and understanding about the teaching of writing. The study, although limited in its generalizability, still raises issues for teacher education. My reflections have led me to believe that we should ask nothing of our students that we do not ask of ourselves. First, the study illuminates how teacher research and self-study can inform the design of courses and the practice of teacher educators. Zeichner (1995) indicated that most academicians involved in teacher research pay little homage to the process of action research in school-based inquiry or in studying their own university-based teaching practices as a form of knowledge production.

Secondly, the findings suggest that the five invitations work as an integral unit in preparing future teachers' developing understanding of literacy theory. The course, designed with a Vygotiskian lens, presented preservice teachers with multiple situated learning activities and shared tasks between and among peers, elementary students, and the workshop leader. By working in pairs, preservice teachers had multiple opportunities to socially share and construct knowledge with others. They were able to plan and develop a hypothetical letter explaining their literacy classroom

and apply their new knowledge to analyze student writing. They were also able to witness and experience theory into practice. As Steve said, "Through actually working with and observing a student progress through the writing process, I am beginning to see myself as a writing teacher."

Preservice teachers were able to work within their zone of proximal development by making their own small mistakes. Within these partnerships, they shared ideas, mistakes and successes which allowed them to see themselves as human beings. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, they did not have adequate time to exchange feedback with the classroom teacher. Opportunities to share and negotiate ideas with the classroom teacher could support the connection of theory, research and engagement. Consequently, I have come to understand the importance of collaborative relationships at work in the course, i.e., peer with peer, peer with elementary student, peer with classroom teacher and peer with workshop leader. Simply placing preservice teachers in cohorts or pairs is not enough. Joint activities and opportunities to exchange and negotiate knowledge must be planned accordingly. Through such an alignment, future teachers could develop a deeper understanding of what they are learning when they are given opportunities to work together by sharing tasks and goals.

At the beginning of the semester, I wanted to determine the effect that these invitations had on preservice teachers' notions about the teaching of writing, yet at the end of this study, I wondered if they were offering comments that I *wanted* to hear. So, twelve months after course grades were submitted, I contacted the three participants' by telephone. I wanted to inquire about if and how they were teaching writing and if they utilized what they learned from their student teaching experience.

My first interview was with Steve. After swapping stories, I discovered that he was working with 20 third grade students in a heterogeneous and diverse classroom. He talked about the challenges and rewards of conducting mini-lessons and conferences with an entire class. Although he never had a chance to witness how the classroom teacher managed the writing classroom in the block, he stated, "I believe that working in pairs really helped me to understand the power of what we did. My students work in pairs to conference about their writing all the time!"

Later that week, I called Clare. When we spoke, she was a bit frustrated with the writing experiences her students had at her site. She was placed in a first grade classroom with 25 students in a rural school district. During our conversation, Clare mentioned that she encouraged writing across subject areas and used children's literature as a model for mini-lessons. She said, "When I walked into the classroom, the first thing I noticed was the arrangement of desks; the teacher's desk was at the front of the room and the students' desks were positioned in rows. So much for working in collaborative groups! I realized that establishing a writing community would not be something that I could just walk in and facilitate. I was still able to initiate two classmade big books since I remembered the pride and sense of ownership that our field experience kids felt." Despite the fact that Clare's placement did not offer her opportunities to fully explore the nature of a writing workshop, she recognized and negotiated the daily tensions of working within a philosophically different environment.

My final call was to Julie. She worked in a fifth grade classroom where she taught Language Arts, Reading and Social Studies to two different groups of 24 students. At the time of our conversation, Julie had been facilitating and guiding the students' letter writing campaign. She told me that her students were interested in various issues and wanted to know the answers to their inquires. Moreover, she explained that the classroom teacher had been enrolled in a Master's program and wanted to explore some of the theories about inquiry with the students. Julie stated, "I feel very fortunate to be working in this classroom. I now see how writing plays a powerful role within the inquiry cycle. I am also learning that the process takes a lot of time. It is much different that the way I was taught and I am still learning how to really listen to students before jumping to tell them the way I would do it."

From the participants' comments, I realized that they now view writing as a social process. Whether they recognized it or not, they had moved away from the very traditional, romantic conceptions of writing in their autobiographies to a more collective, pluralistic one. At the beginning of the semester, they revealed that they had come to understand writing through an analytic process by breaking language into small parts. As a result of participating in the block

invitations, they now viewed the teaching of writing as an opportunity where students' write for real reasons and for real audiences. From the follow up phone calls, I learned that the block invitations, grounded in socially shared cognition, led to preservice teachers' individual collaborative mind sets. Furthermore, I found that the preservice partnerships provided substantial insights to their current teaching of writing practices. They were facilitating opportunities for their students to work with their peers to support learning. Preservice teachers were able to comment on their previous course knowledge with specific references to their own students' understanding of what they were teaching. Moreover, their statements embraced a sense of professional growth as they shared their unfolding theories of who they were becoming as teachers of writing. As Grumet (1988) so eloquently noted, "One of the purposes of the writing workshop is the desire to establish a world for children that is richer, larger, more colorful, and more accessible than the one we have known" (p. xii). In considering the deeper meaning of these words, I now understand the impact of the course invitations. The students and myself both gained insights into how we were developing as teachers from our intellectual and affective interactions.

Thus, I have discovered that learning, thinking, and knowing arise through collaboration with others (Hatano & Inagaki, 1991). As Short and Burke (1989) contend, teacher educators need to live their own models. I was interested in the ways the block invited preservice teachers to think about writing and found myself in a constant stream of reflection and learning. In considering the nature of the invitations, I have come to understand that models of collaboration and interpersonal activity are intimately connected. As a result of my inquiry, I have learned that the block invitations do in fact present a conceptual and theoretical base for teaching in the lives of Clare, Julie and Steve. As Berthoff (1990) states, "We need to offer ourselves and our students assisted invitations to discover what we are doing and how we are doing it in order to empower our sense of learning." Each invitation becomes a window of understanding from which future insights can grow and future connections can develop. I have come to view the close examination of my teaching and the learning of my preservice teachers as an avenue for continuous growth. If tomorrow's classrooms are ones in which children work together to write and talk about their world, then we need to begin

with ourselves and our future educators.

Notes

* I am indebted to the colleagues in my writing class for their constructive comments.

1. The term "invitation" pertains to the activities and course assignments referred to within the paper.

2. Zone of proximal development refers to the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. See Vygotsky, 1978 (p. 86).

3. In his piece "What is Literacy?," James Gee defines acquisition as a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error without a process of formal teaching. Occurring in natural and meaningful settings, the acquirer knows and wants to function, so acquires the thing he is exposed to.

4. See Gee (1987). He states that learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching though not necessarily from someone "officially" designated a teacher.

5. Thank you to Judy Fueyo who provided an explanation of the intentions of the course invitations.

6. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the students.

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## APPENDIX

Note: The following is a list of interview questions that were developed as a guide for initiating discussions with the three preservice teachers in this study.

Questions pertaining to home and school experiences:

1. What types of writing activities did you experience in elementary school? in middle school?, in high school?, in college? Tell me more about the teachers' expectations of writing during these years.
2. What kinds of writing do you remember seeing your parents doing while growing up? Tell me more about your parents' expectations for your writing and spelling success.
3. Tell me more about the process you undergo when you were asked to write for class.

Questions exploring the impact of the course invitations:

1. Describe yourself as an adult writer. What kind of writer are you? What types of writing do you do that is not required for class?
2. Think about the course readings. How were they informative or non informative in terms of learning about writing?
3. Tell me about how you will foster writing instruction in your own classroom.
4. How has this course shaped your thoughts about writing instruction? about teaching?, about learning? about children?
5. Tell me more about your thoughts on writing with the third grade students at the elementary school.
6. Tell me more about your growth this semester in terms of your knowledge of writing instruction; your understanding of the role of writing in the elementary classroom and yourself as a writer and as a future teacher of writing.

7. In what ways has this course and field experience influenced or not influenced the ways you perceive yourself as a

    a) learner

    b) writer

    c) teacher

8. How has this course changed you as a writer? or are you changing as a writer because of the class? Please tell me about this.

9. What about your views on writing and the way kids learn writing. Tell me how the course has contributed to your growing knowledge?

Follow-up questions to test the reliability of the invitations (conducted one year later)

1. Tell me more about what you are doing now in your practicum?

2. What effect did the field experience, course lectures and readings have on your current views about teaching writing?

3. Describe the types of writing experiences that you have been able to facilitate during your student teaching practicum.

4. How is writing viewed by the students in your classroom?

5. Describe the type of writing classroom you hope to foster as a result of your recent experience.